JOANA FREITAS

Kill the Orchestra

On Music, Mods, and Immersion in The Elder Scrolls *on the Nexus Mods Platform*

ABSTRACT In the age of participatory and convergence paradigms, video game music has its own networked culture with cybercommunities that discuss, share, and create content, thus opening up a creative space for artistic activities in a constant digital flow. Music composition and production is one of these activities, with files made available on several platforms such as SoundCloud and YouTube, specifically in the format of modification files (or mods). Building on research for a master's dissertation, this article examines a new model of online artistic production in the form of the circulation of musical mods that were composed and shared on the Nexus Mods platform for the *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* video games. These mods add new musical material that is similar to the existing soundtrack of both titles, but the majority of the files in this platform's audio category are related only to sounds, not to musical composition. By using titles such as "better sounds" or "immersive sounds" to describe their additions, many modders aim to give other gamers a more immersive experience in the game(s). In this case, *immersive* relates not only to the musical style and sound quality of the aural effects but also a plausible construction of the reality in which the gamers live, play, and negotiate meaning relating to their own social context. Intersecting "playbour," fandom, aural immersion, and audiovisual literacy, these audio modders work on adding new layers to the soundscapes and environments of the virtual worlds presented in the two games. The modders regard immersion as a key aspect of design and playability, and they contribute audio material to enable their social capital and visibility on online platforms.   KEYWORDS soundtrack, mods, immersion, realism, playbour, cybercommunities

SKYRIM: MOD IT UNTIL IT CRASHES — INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Alexander Velicky uploaded to the Nexus Mods site, one of the most-used platforms for the creation and use of modification files, the *Falskaar* mod (referred to as a "DLC sized new lands mod"), which added more than twenty hours of new gameplay, with new areas, quests, characters and—of particular relevance to this research—a newly composed full soundtrack. Intended for the fifth installation of the *Elder Scrolls* series, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2011), this mod quickly gained considerable visibility online, both on the original platform and beyond, resulting in news coverage and several articles about this file and its creator.[1] As Velicky puts it, his "day

1. Ian Birnbaum, "Behind Falskaar, a Massive New Skyrim Mod, and the 19-Year-Old Who Spent a Year Building It," *PC Gamer*, July 16, 2013, accessed January 22, 2021, https://www.pcgamer.com/behind-falskaar-a-massive-new-skyrim-mod-and-the-19-year-old-who-spent-a-year-building-it/; Robert Purchese, "Teenager's Massive Skyrim Mod Took 2000 Hours to Make," Eurogamer, July 17, 2013, accessed January 22, 2021, https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2013-07-17-hey-bethesda-this-19yo-spent-2000-hours-making-a-25-hour-skyrim-mod.

job" consisted of working on this mod for more than 2,000 hours in order to apply for a job at Bethesda, the company that produced the video game. To present the best possible portfolio, he focused on creating content that would match the experience levels demanded by the development team. All this work paid off and Velicky got a job, but not at Bethesda: he got to be a designer at Bungie, the company responsible for titles such as *Halo* (2001–) and *Destiny* (2014).[2]

While this example gained attention from the media and news platforms due to its scale, Velicky's mod is only one notable result from the active participation and engagement of many users in online cybercommunities. Looking at *Skyrim* alone, in 2020, nine years after the game was released, new mods and other types of content were still being produced to either add to or transform original elements of the gaming experience, thus maintaining the relevance of this older RPG and contributing to the fact that it is still trending among the latest titles.[3] At the time of this writing, there are thousands of mods for *Skyrim* (over 65,000 files), an expansive practice that is reflected in popular memes such as the image in Figure 1. The high level of participation and engagement of people who produce and transform mods is evident in Nexus Mods. This digital hub is still the number one modding site, having gathered more than 1,000 games and over 24 million users since 2001. The platform presents a rich array of objects that can be analyzed in the context of game studies, where modding and its practices have been studied by academics in social sciences and media studies, particularly during the first decade of the 2000s. By paying close attention to the importance of modding in the context of participatory culture, it is possible to see how thousands of users have voluntarily produced, uploaded, and made available an almost never-ending flow of digital content, thus becoming the most important agents in the circulation of multiple online products such as texts, videos, memes, logs, and music.[4]

Taking into account previous research conducted in 2017–2018, this article aims to examine the production of mods for the video games *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2006) and *Skyrim* by studying the audio content on the Nexus Mods platform in the categories of "Audio, Sound and Music" and "Audio - SFX, Music, and Voice," respectively.[5] Both categories contain, in total, almost 1,800 files of audio and music, including music composed specifically for those mods and also pre-existing

---

2. Jon Leo, "19-Year-Old Created 25-Hour Skyrim Mod to Apply for a Job at Bethesda", GameSpot, July 18, 2013, accessed January 22, 2021, https://www.gamespot.com/articles/19-year-old-created-25-hour-skyrim-mod-to-apply-for-a-job-at-bethesda/1100-6411623/.

3. Braeden Rowe, "Why Is 'Skyrim' Still Fun after All This Time? Mods!," Culture of Gaming, August 3, 2020, accessed January 22, 2021, https://cultureofgaming.com/why-is-skyrim-still-fun-after-all-this-time-mods/.

4. Jenkins, Henry. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

5. I was able to demonstrate the existence of a new model of online artistic production and circulation of musical mods composed and shared in the Nexus Mods platform for the *Oblivion* and *Skyrim* video games, the two titles with the biggest file database at the time. These mods add new musical material similar to the pre-existent soundtrack of both video games so as to not only propose new music for user's gameplay, but primarily to further improve immersion and emotional engagement with the interactive experience. See Joana Freitas, "'The Music Is the Only Thing You Don't Have to Mod': The Musical Composition in Modification Files for Videogames" (master's thesis, Lisbon, NOVA FCSH, 2017).
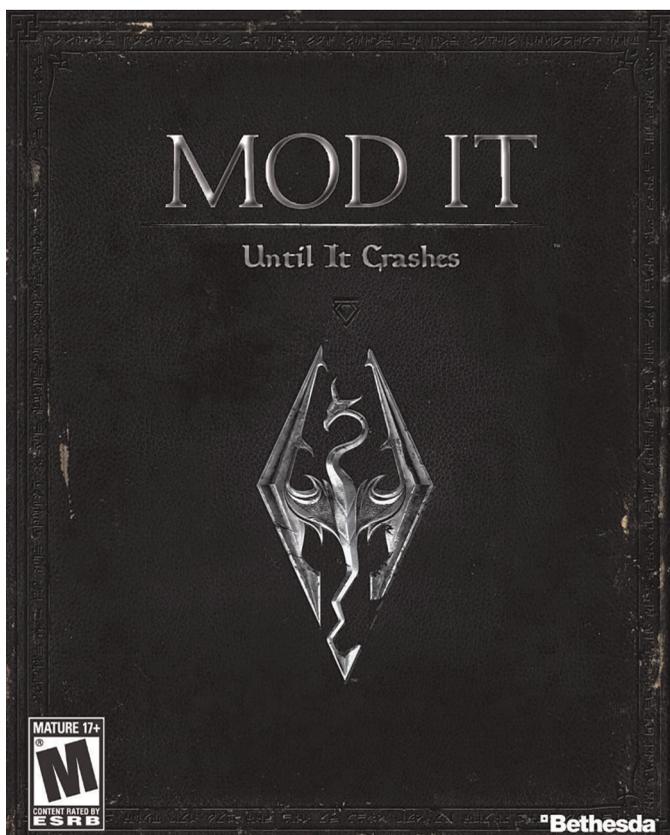
FIGURE 1. An alternate cover for *Skyrim* concerning the large amount of mods produced for this game; excessive modding can cause errors and problems that prevent the game from working properly.
(Source: https://www.nexusmods.com/skyrim/mods/32363/).

music adapted for these files. By applying the search filters of "most downloaded" and "most endorsed," I was able to limit the selection to especially popular mods. This selection resulted in more than 500 mods for both video games. A specific section of this collected data was created and labeled "others" in order to organize the corresponding mods that were related to audio and music but *without* any music. By filtering and examining the description and information about each mod, it was possible to identify, among the wide range of functions offered by the mods to enhance each player's own gameplay, files that aim to limit or entirely remove the musical accompaniment in certain game areas or actions, such as taverns or battles, for example.

If, for these modders, music and its corresponding style are key to conveying a more immersive experience—which is the main objective of the majority of mods available in the gaming universe—what are the main motivations for creating modification files that aim to remove music?

In this article, I will discuss the mods for *Oblivion* and *Skyrim* that focus on the direct relation between sound and immersion in order to provide a *better* interactive experience

for the player.[6] Either by using keywords such as "better sounds" or "immersive sounds" or by using titles such as *Silence Is Golden*, these modders link the immersive aspect of sound not only to its quality but also to the construction of realism by limiting or entirely removing non-diegetic music. These practices can be considered a niche in the broader spectrum of modding because, for these titles, the main trend is to add and transform musical content for the same immersive purpose. In this context, immersion is a convergent aspect of design, gameplay, and online visibility, where through the intersection of fandom, "playbour," and audiovisual literacy these modders negotiate meaning and agency in their own construction of reality by working, transforming, adding, or removing layers of music, sound, and ambiance.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW ON MODDING AND DIGITAL PRACTICES

Video games and their players, according to Larissa Hjorth, are at the forefront of innovative consumer practices, constituting one example of emerging models of participatory media in the twenty-first century. The component of active engagement in this format, in terms of both production and consumption, allows for the blurring of the limits on the roles that the consumer, user, and player assume in this media, diffusing the various processes of creativity, from creation to distribution, when applied to the diverse content of video games.[7]

The existence of websites and tools that allow "produsers" to produce—or, at least, transform—content for video games, from narratives to music, contributes to the idea that the internet is an open space for autonomous and creative activity in audiovisual media.[8] The integration of these users into cybercommunities and online sites that host and disseminate numerous forms of artistic expression is directly related to the various elements of participatory culture proposed by Henry Jenkins.[9] In short, this culture has (1) relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement; (2) strong support for the creation and sharing of others' content; (3) informal mentoring between the most

6. Both video games can be considered pivotal in the history of the RPG genre, including the respective soundtracks, and these titles have been explored in other academic fields, including ludomusicology. Among several perspectives, it is worth pointing out studies concerning the ludic aspect and semiotics by Paul Martin (2011), Ian Hart (2014), and Joana Freitas (2018), identity and representation by Victoria Cooper (2016) and Michael Austin (2018), and musical style and aesthetics by Brendan Lamb and Barnabas Smith (2018) and Michiel Kamp and Mark Sweeney (2019).

7. Larissa Hjorth, *Games and Gaming: An Introduction to New Media* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2011).

8. Axel Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008). *Produsers*—merging the words *producers* and *users*—is a term coined by Axel Bruns in the context of *produsage*, aiming to explore and define the phenomenon of the increased participation of consumers and their transformation into producers in a networked context, thus blurring the boundaries between passive consumption, active production, and the circulation of content in a collaborative environment.

9. Benedict Anderson proposed the concept of imagined communities in 1983 to analyze nationalism and the social construction of communities in a nation. This concept can also be related to media and to the way a group of individuals forms an audience that interrelates through the sharing of common interests, even if they do not interact directly with each other. People who join and operate in an imagined community—or, in the case of mods, an online community—may never get to know each other or communicate directly, even though they share the same space because of their personal identity and affinity with a certain object or interest, which in this context is the search and creation of modification files for video games.

experienced members and beginners; (4) members who believe that their contributions have value; and (5) members who feel a degree of social connection with others and concern for their opinions of their creations.[10] It is important to highlight the elements associated with "artistic expression," which allow users to express their ideas, motivations, and/or knowledge through creative forms—for instance, digital sampling, skinning (creation of alternative visuals for computer programs, websites, etc.), modding, fan videos (and fanzines), and/or mash-ups.

Among these practices, *modding* is users producing, transforming, adapting, and sharing custom-made video game content, or working on pre-existing content, in a free and voluntary fashion. The term *mod* started being used at the end of the '90s and its popularity has grown since then to the present day; several authors have shown, however, that modification files have been present in the history of video game culture and technology for at least four decades.[11]

There are several definitions of *mods* and *modding*, although the majority converge around the same aspects mentioned previously. A concise definition of the term is presented by Tanja Sihvonen: "the activity of creating and adding of custom-created content, *mods,* short for *modifications*, by players to existing (commercial) computer games."[12] Greg Finch compares mods to fan fictions and, together with Sihvonen, mentions the range of possibilities for these files from small corrections of internal system errors in a specific video game ("partial conversions") to the "total conversions" that turn it into a new experience.[13] Walt Scacchi proposes the systematization of mods for video games according to their functions or target objects, such as the user interface in a given video game or the addition of narrative segments through animation:

> Modding is a "Do It Yourself" approach to technology personalization that can establish both socio-technical and distributed cognitions for how to innovate by resting control over technology design from their producers. Modding is a form of meta-gaming—playing games for playing with the game systems. At least five types of game mods can be observed: user interface customization; game conversions; machinima and

10. Henry Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 5–6.

11. Authors claim the first signs of this practice come from the hacking culture during the 1960s with the *SpaceWar!* mod. In the following years, there were also *Ms. Pac-Man*, developed in 1981 and released in 1982, as well as *Lode Runner* in 1983. Another example is the title *Castle Smurfenstein*, a parody version of the *Castle Wolfenstein* first-person shooter from 1993. A milestone in the development of the practice of modding was the release of the video game *DOOM* in 1993 by id Software, a company specifically designed for the production of mods, releasing the WADs (Where's All the Data?) and DEU (Doom Editing Utility) tools and The Doom Construction Kit: Mastering and Modifying Doom. For further reading, see Wagner James Au, "Triumph of the Mod," Salon, April 16, 2002, Accessed February 10, 2021, https://www.salon.com/2002/04/16/modding/; Erik Champion, *Game Mods: Design, Theory and Criticism* (Pittsburgh, PA: ETC Press, 2012), accessed February 10, 2021, http://repository.cmu.edu/etcpress/11; Peter Christiansen, "Between a Mod and a Hard Place," in Champion, *Game Mods*, 29–49.

12. Tanja Sihvonen, *Players Unleashed! Modding the Sims and the Culture of Gaming* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 37.

13. Greg Finch, "The Top 10 Game Mods of All Time," The Creators Project, July 20, 2011, accessed January 22, 2021, http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/the-top-10-game-mods-of-all-time.

art mods; game computer customization; and game console hacking. Each enables different kinds of affordances that govern mods, modding practices, and modders.[14]

Modding is mainly characterized by its free nature, open access, and the visibility that comes from sharing a file on several platforms, from social networks to YouTube, with top lists, votes, and articles about the "best mods" for particular video games. This phenomenon combines fun, play, and community, according to Nathaniel Poor.[15] There are three key motivations for modding: (1) authors create mods and variants of these files (like add-ons and maps) because they feel it is an artistic endeavor and a creative escape that allows them to contribute something relevant, as well as contribute to their communities; (2) authors feel that modifying allows them to identify with video games and thereby increase their own appreciation of them; and (3) authors believe that they can use their experience and resources to find a job or a lucrative position in the video game industry.[16] The second and third motivations are reinforced by Olli Sotaama, who states that the practice of modification is another example of the various ways for authors to acquire gaming capital and express their identification with a specific video game.[17]

As described at the beginning of this article, modder Alexander Velicky is a clear example of the economy of modding.[18] His mod, *Falskaar*, along with others' mods, contributed to the extension of shelf life for *Skyrim* and the engagement of regular (and new) players for the game, as the game studio didn't have to further invest in creating more content and more employment. In fact, Bethesda is known—for both good and bad reasons—for launching their video games when they are almost "incomplete" or in need of several fixes and patches. This problem is tackled when players promptly engage and upload the files needed to optimize the games' performance and playability, using their own development tools or those provided by Bethesda to promote modding and keep the cybercommunity close:

> Bethesda has a long history of supporting the modding community, and for good reason. It's a science fact that mod tools make the world a better place: they make modders happy because they can mod, they make developers happy to see modders

14. Walt Scacchi, "Computer Game Mods, Modders, Modding, and the Mod Scene," *First Monday* 15, no. 5 (2010), accessed February 10, 2021, https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v15i5.2965.

15. Nathaniel Poor, "Computer Game Modders' Motivations and Sense of Community: A Mixed-Methods Approach," *New Media & Society* 16, no. 8 (December 1, 2014): 1249–67, accessed February 10, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813504266.

16. Hector Postigo, "Of Mods and Modders: Chasing Down the Value of Fan-Based Digital Game Modifications," *Games and Culture* 2, no. 4 (October 1, 2007): 300–13, accessed February 10, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412007307955.

17. Olli Sotamaa, "When the Game Is Not Enough: Motivations and Practices among Computer Game Modding Culture," *Games and Culture* 5, no. 3 (January 7, 2010): 243, accessed February 10, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412009359765.

18. Julian Kücklich refers to the process of ownership of user creations by game studios and companies as "the economy of modding"; Kücklich, "Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry," in "Precarious Labour," special issue, *Fibreculture Journal*, no. 5 (December 2005), accessed February 10, 2021, http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precarious-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/.

gaining experience, and they make fans happy to see an endless stream of content they can mess around with.[19]

Like Velicky, many other users aim to build a gaming portfolio in order to demonstrate their experience and skills in producing content for video games in the hopes of entering the industry as professionals; modding is sometimes referred to as a part-time or "day job," raising important questions regarding labor and copyright. A clear example is the online shooter game *Counter-Strike* (2000), which is the result of a total conversion mod of *Half-Life* (Valve, 1998). Not only did the company not have to use its resources to develop this game, but by gathering a team of people to take responsibility for the mod, this studio was already associated with a very popular video game with an established fan base before its commercial release. This is also one of the first examples of a modding community acting as a testing ground for ideas that may be profitable in the future. Therefore, by considering the modding phenomenon mainly as leisure and entertainment for modders and disregarding the chance of obtaining any financial outcome, it's possible to affirm that

> modding and productive forms of waged labour are comparable in regard to the fact that the creators of the produced goods do not "own" their products. By the terms of the original game's [*Half-Life*] EULA, mods usually remain the property of the game's manufacturer, and while some modders have received payments by game developers, they are usually barred from receiving royalties, as explicitly stated in the *Half-Life* SDK's EULA quoted above.[20]

These forms of content creation are the result of *playbour*—play and labor (*labour* in British English, where the term originated). If modding is a phenomenon characterized by fans, combining fun and community, and without any intention of making a profit, playbour raises the problem of the commercialization of fun by the video game industry. The precarity of playbour comes from work that is voluntarily provided, unpaid, appreciated, and exploited.[21] Modding, along with other forms of "free work" in online spaces, does not fall entirely into categories such as freelance work or volunteer work but shares characteristics with them. Playbour and the act of modding, however, are associated with a set of rules and practices specific to this environment based on two main aspects. Firstly, voluntary work is derived from a specific sense of identity, particularly within the cyber-community, as the main motivation for this type of personal engagement. On the other hand, there is also the possibility for freelance work and a participatory involvement in culture and converging media, both supported by technology/digital resources and by the players themselves in the video games industry.[22]

19. Matt Grandstaff, "New Creation Kit to Bring Modding Tools to Skyrim," Bethesda Blog, January 19, 2011, formerly available at http://www.bethblog.com/2011/01/19/new-creation-kit-to-bring-modding-tools-to-skyrim/, quoted at https://www.overclock.net/threads/bethesda-new-creation-kit-to-bring-modding-tools-to-skyrim.919236/ (accessed February 10, 2021).

20. Kücklich, "Precarious Playbour."

21. Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text* 18, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 33–58.

22. Kücklich, "Precarious Playbour."

All these topics highlight some of the questions tackled by previous research on mods and their practices, from anthropology and sociology to economics and digital studies. There has been little discussion, however, about the *type* of content, particularly sound and music content, that is produced. Like Velicky, who felt the need to create a full, newly composed soundtrack to accompany more than twenty hours of new gameplay for *Skyrim*, it is possible to find many more aural mods with multiple uses on Nexus Mods, which raises pertinent questions.

KILL THE ORCHESTRA: MUSICAL MODS WITHOUT MUSIC, SOUND MODS WITH BETTER SOUNDS

Modification files aside, many video games allow players to alter the different levels of aural information, from soundtrack to sound effects. From the *Assassin's Creed* saga to *Stardew Valley* or the *Dragon Age* series, these games' menus provide customization options for the volume level of each auditory component—generally music, sound effects, and/or voices. The players can lower or maximize the soundtrack level, or they can opt to hear only sound effects during their gameplay. Other video games can also be customized with add-ons and in-game options, such as the MMORPG *World of Warcraft* for which the 2006 add-on *Soundtrack* was created to allow the players to add whichever music tracks they'd like to listen to while exploring the world of Azeroth.[23] Another case is the folder titled "Custom Music" in *Civilization IV* that enables the players to completely alter the musical accompaniment to their gameplay.[24] Players can create personal playlists in *Hearts of Iron IV* by tweaking some files in the game's music folder.[25] Even *Oblivion* and *Skyrim* have volume sliders on the corresponding main menu, altering or "removing" entirely the sound and/or music.

Although standard in-game optional customization is integrated into the majority of mainstream video games and is therefore familiar to regular players, it doesn't provide as broad a range of personalization as in the files created by many modders to enable a more immersive experience of gameplay in their cybercommunities. This topic is explored in more depth below.

Among the mods I investigated that are available in the audio and music category for *Oblivion* and *Skyrim*, there are several entries whose combination of titles and descriptions indicate their main function and also the personal perspective of the mods' authors concerning the soundtrack and its role during the active gameplay. These mods, as mentioned previously, can be considered as "others" in the midst of musical/sound mods because the term *music* is mentioned but music itself is not present. Among the files that add new voices to characters, manipulate the sound spectrum in various settings and environments of the game map, or enable the addition of music through specific tools for

23. This add-on can be found here: https://www.curseforge.com/wow/addons/soundtrack (accessed January 22, 2021).

24. Karen M. Cook, "Music, History, and Progress in Sid Meier's Civilization IV," in *Music in Video Games: Studying Play*, ed. K. J. Donnelly, William Gibbons, and Neil Lerner (New York: Routledge, 2014), 166–82.

25. The option "Music Modding" for this game can be reached here: https://hoi4.paradoxwikis.com/Music_modding (accessed January 22, 2021).

this context, several of these files seek to limit the presence of music both at the level of its function and/or placement—battle, exploration, city—and in certain locations, for example dungeons or taverns.[26]

To explore this further, the mods *Musical Immersion* and *Heartbeat Battle Music* for *Oblivion* and *Kill the Orchestra* for *Skyrim* were selected for a further analysis on their objectives for each player's gameplay and the authors' standpoint on the functional relationship between the absence or limited functions of music and its consequent role in immersion and realism.[27]

By creating a mod titled *Musical Immersion* for the game *Oblivion*, the modder Rathe has adapted the music to delimit certain actions, making the music more attuned with the perception of the player. The main change this mod makes is in the way combat music accompanies the action: instead of this music starting when a player's character is in a place with enemies (whether they are visible or not), as it happens in the standard game, the file triggers the respective musical track when the player sees an enemy threat approaching in an aggressive fashion:

> Now Combat Music will only play when "you" have already realized that you are in combat! For the drums of war to start you must spot an enemy moving aggressively towards you. Technically, the system will measure several factors to make sure the enemy is clearly within your line of sight, and for long enough to be perceived by you. For added realism, an enemy close enough will set off combat music more quickly and easily, even if they are only in your peripheral vision. If you fail to spot your enemy at all, Combat Music may still start when you are hit by surprise. On the other hand, if you run past your enemy without noticing him, you will never realize you were in danger. This setup allows Combat Music to feed the violence of battle, without giving you a sixth sense for danger.[28]

Rathe wants the game's music to convey what he considers to be realistic during the various stages of the battle, from the initial threat to the moment when there is no danger, by providing refined functions to the soundtrack such as surprise and suspense. This mod also extends the "silence" heard between the tracks during the exploration of the world (or "adventure music"), so that the player is able to listen to the different soundscapes of each environment such as the combination of the vegetation, wind,

26. In both games, the soundtrack is divided into categories that limit a certain number of tracks to be heard in specific contexts. While *Skyrim* has a more extensive and detailed soundtrack—organized not only by place but also by time of day, from morning to night—it shares most categories with its predecessor: Explore, Public (in *Oblivion*) and Town (in *Skyrim*), Battle (in *Oblivion*) and Combat (in *Skyrim*), Dungeon, Tavern (*Skyrim* only), and Special (in both games), Other (*Skyrim* only) for isolated events and/or contexts such as leveling up or finding relevant places.

27. It's worth noting that immersion, when related specifically to video games, has been studied by several authors who are particularly important for providing a solid conceptual framework and tools to analyze music in audiovisual media: Katie Tekinbaş Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Winifred Phillips, *A Composer's Guide to Game Music* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014); Gordon Calleja, *In-Game: From Immersion to Incorporation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011); and others mentioned later in this article.

28. Description for *Musical Immersion*, mod uploaded by user Rathe, Nexus Mods, March 14, 2008, accessed January 22, 2021, https://www.nexusmods.com/oblivion/mods/15970.

animals, footsteps, and other aural components of a given ambiance. For Rathe, "Music will now only serve to 'enhance' your immersion experience in Oblivion, using Oblivion's awesome soundtrack to create an immersive atmosphere that is finally 'in sync with your perception.'"[29]

The importance of music in the combat category is also visible in the mod *Heartbeat Battle Music*. For the author aɪa36341 (or Vihud), the music from the battle context is not realistic in terms of immersion, and Vihud searched for several mods that add more sound effects to the environment of *Oblivion*. The deactivation of the soundtrack is, according to the author, more realistic for gameplay, but it prevents the modder from knowing when he is in combat.[30] Therefore, this file replaces combat music with a heartbeat track. While Vihud does not add more details to the descriptive space of the mod, the substitution of the combat soundtrack with the sound of a heartbeat replicates one of the functions of the original music: it alerts the player to the fact that they are in danger.

Several mods focus on specific musical categories, mainly exploration and battle. *Skyrim* has even more modification files than *Oblivion*, several of which aim to transform the presence of music in dangerous situations. These mods have the same or similar functions to the two examples discussed earlier—they seek to eliminate or limit combat music during individual gameplay and to stress the sound effects that characterize the various environments that make up the landscape of *Skyrim*.

In *Skyrim*, the mod *Kill the Orchestra* by user alt3rnɪty has quite an obvious function, as indicated by its name and image design as shown in Figure 2.[31] This modder's file is meant to deactivate the soundtrack in all the game's places/categories; from their point of view, the absence of music creates a more immersive experience because it forces the player to pay more attention and be more cautious in their gameplay. Without the "invisible orchestra throughout the game," this user also notes the importance of the sound effects and ambiance, which they "improved" by removing the music in order to enhance the gameplay.[32]

An interesting aspect of this mod, which is quite common in similar examples, is the fact that the soundtrack removal is not total. This file allows the player to choose to remove the soundtrack according to their character's location; in this mod, all music is disabled except for specific categories, which includes brief musical moments when a specific location is discovered (for instance, a temple of dragons), when the player levels up, and also the music in taverns. When the player enters a tavern, the soundtrack

---

29. Description for *Musical Immersion*.

30. As Vihud states in the description page of the mod: "For immersion, music isn't quite realistic, and I wanted to make my Oblivion experience as immersive as possible. While finding mods that add atmospheric sounds (listed below), I realized a problem; disabling music is more realistic, but I have no way of knowing when I'm in combat." *Heartbeat Battle Music*, mod uploaded by user aɪa36341, Nexus Mods, March 5, 2008, accessed January 22, 2021, https://www.nexusmods.com/oblivion/mods/15721.

31. In the course of this investigation, this mod was removed from the Nexus Mods platform for both versions of *Skyrim* for unknown reasons, but it can still be accessed on alternative sites. *Kill the Orchestra 3.1*, mod uploaded by user alt3rnɪty, AFK Mods, January 25, 2017, accessed January 22, 2021, https://www.afkmods.com/index.php?/files/file/1264-kill-the-orchestra/.
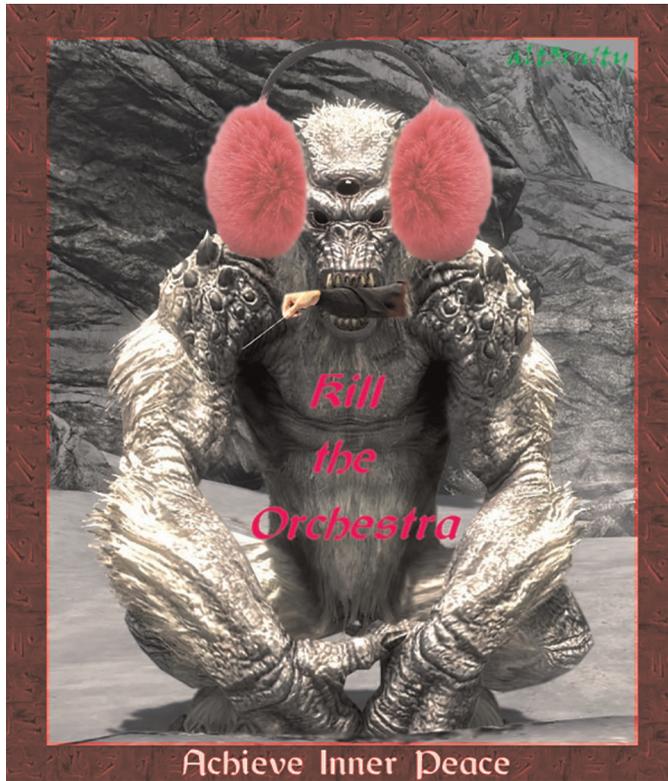
32. Description for *Kill the Orchestra*.

FIGURE 2. The official image/logo of the mod *Kill the Orchestra*. One of Skyrim's enemies is represented, a snow troll, with a pair of pink ear plugs and a maestro's arm with a baton in its mouth. (Source: https://www.afkmods.com/index.php?/topic/3976-relz-kill-the-orchestra/).

automatically changes to music selected randomly from the "tavern" category. The presence of bards in these places, who may sing or play a lute, a drum, or a flute, does not influence the non-diegetic soundtrack. When the player interacts with these characters and asks them to play a piece from their repertoire, the bards' music takes over and interrupts the pre-existing musical accompaniment until their performance is finished. Thus, it is likely that, for alt3rnɪty, the "stupid orchestra" that bothers the troll monsters is only unnecessary in exploration and combat, situations that would be unlikely to have a musical accompaniment in "real life." Another similar mod is titled *Silence Is Golden*.[33] The modder grazman describes their mod as a "nice peaceful game free of the Jeremy Soule soundtrack music and other immersion breaking sounds," enabling the user to select which soundtrack to keep according to their context.[34]

33. *Silence Is Golden*, mod uploaded by user grazman, Nexus Mods, November 3, 2015, accessed January 22, 2021, https://www.nexusmods.com/skyrim/mods/71104/.

34. In fact, the mod is so closely related to *Kill the Orchestra* that players raised that question in the forum section; grazman affirmed that they didn't know about the previous mod, while other users indicated that, on a positive note, this mod allows the "special" category to be customized and wasn't deleted, unlike the other one.

It is worth mentioning some other similar mods, for example, *No _____ Music* or *Silence of Skyrim*, which always refer to the absence of music and which focus, above all, on providing a "peaceful," "calm" experience, without music breaking the immersion instead of reinforcing it.[35] This experience is related, according to several of these modders, to the idea of realistic environments and spaces, such as dungeons, mountains, or forests, where there is no (non-diegetic) music. Through these and other similar mods, one can thus observe the multiplicity of perspectives from the cyber-community on the role of music in video games: the individual positions of authors and users are obviously dependent on their personal taste and singular experiences of gameplay, which thus constitute a heterogeneous cloud of points of view. Therefore, as mentioned, not only does this indicate a will to eliminate all music present in combat or in dungeons in order to make these seem more realistic, but it is also possible to verify statements such as: "You may just want scarier dungeons and more realistic exteriors, but you don't want to get rid of the music you hear while in public locations (cities)."[36]

Most mods that seek to remove or limit the musical action in *Oblivion* or *Skyrim* thus present motivations and objectives based on what their authors define as realism and the various soundscapes it comprises. There are, however, fewer of these files compared to all the others in the audio and music category on the Nexus Mods platform, and they have fewer downloads. Two other types of objects are responsible for most of the activity, sharing, and discussion around audio components: (1) "improvement" and control mods for the various sound effects of both video games, and (2) musical mods, which reinforces music's importance in this context for those who play and modify.

Sound effect mods—with titles such as *Immersive Sounds*, *Audio Overhaul*, or *Sounds of Cyrodiil*—aim to transform, add, and/or replace the various soundscapes of these video games in order to get closer to the most "realistic" experience possible in order to reinforce immersive gameplay.[37] From the sound of "better" thunder to the fauna present in a forest, the "better" sound spectrum associated with nature, objects, and living beings in the environments of *Oblivion* and *Skyrim* are understood by the users of Nexus Mods as the most important elements for the participant's immersion. The following statement illustrates the idea: "My main goal is to not have one environment that is soundless to enhance immersion."[38] Immersion in this context is conveyed—and enhanced—by merging the experience of the game with the players' reality, that is, the daily life in which they live and operate.

---

35. *No _____ Music*, mod uploaded by user Mr Sirz, Nexus Mods, May 10, 2010, accessed January 22, 2021, www.nexusmods.com/oblivion/mods/31607/; like *Kill the Orchestra*, *Silence of Skyrim* was also removed from the *Nexus Mods* platform for unknown reasons.

36. Description for *No _____ Music*.

37. *Immersive Sounds - Compendium*, mod uploaded by user lazyskeever, Nexus Mods, October 27, 2016, accessed January 22, 2021, https://www.nexusmods.com/skyrim/mods/54387/; *Audio Overhaul for Skyrim 2*, mod uploaded by user LoRd KoRn, Nexus Mods, August 12, 2015, accessed January 22, 2021, https://www.nexusmods.com/skyrim/mods/43773/; *Sounds of Cyrodiil*, mod uploaded by user Cliffworms, Nexus Mods, August 8, 2011, accessed January 22, 2021, https://www.nexusmods.com/oblivion/mods/39804/.

38. Description for *Sounds of Cyrodiil*.

There isn't, in fact, an actual visible orchestra in the middle of a forest, at the top of a mountain, or at the gate of one of the cities of both video games, so in a practical sense, the accompanying soundtrack of all these locations is perceived by these modders as an invisible component that is not compatible with the reality that *Oblivion* or *Skyrim* try to portray. The user's ability to control the presence of music during gameplay also depends on the background effort of producing and editing sound for the various environments that make up the different spaces of the virtual world: the tweets of birds, howls of wolves, the wind, foliage, and other sound effects of flora and fauna, together with the interactions of the player's character in the various locations, are the main sounds that are modified and made available on online platforms by these modders.

Besides the newly composed music mods, dozens of other files support the addition of pre-existing music from multiple media, such as movies and video games, both in a similar or completely different aesthetic, revealing a central concern of many authors: the presence of music in the action and narrative of *Oblivion* and *Skyrim*. Music is, in fact, one of the most important components in these video games, as in so many others, and its style determines the characterization and identification of the player's agency within the game's universe. For modders who aim to reduce the impact of music on gameplay, immersion is directly related to the realism of the sounds in the environments around them; but for most of the cybercommunity, music is a vehicle for (musical) immersion, which establishes the atmosphere of the video game, produces and renegotiates meaning(s), and allows the interactive and emotional engagement of the participant through their character in the multiple adventures they explore in these imaginary worlds.

If immersion is, albeit in a minor way, defined by a virtual experience that is closer to reality in terms of sound quality and specific music for each context, how is it perceived by the majority of users, for whom music is central to their agency and engagement with these alternate universes?

MUSICAL IMMERSION, MEDIA LITERACY, AND LORE-FRIENDLY PRODUCTIONS

To analyze the context of music production for modification files for *Oblivion* and *Skyrim,* discourse analysis of text descriptions, commentaries, and other online activity by users was complemented by ten interviews with the mod composers, which were particularly important for understanding their background motivation, creative process, and identity as players.[39] It was possible to conclude from their responses, along with the mod descriptions, that "immersion" is the idea of the player being "present" in the (virtual) environment of the video game, oblivious to the reality that surrounds them, thus affirming immersion as one of the characteristics and main objectives of any video

---

39. A total of ten modders/composers gave feedback and agreed to be interviewed via email, namely: Alex Cottrell with *Adash – City of Magic* (*Oblivion*), Aarchduke with *Symphonies of Skyrim*, Adamm Khuevrr with *Falskaar* (*Skyrim*), evilbluekoala with three mods for *Oblivion* and one for *Skyrim* titled *Aditional Music*, frustru with *Musical Lore* (*Soundtrack Mod by Nir Shor*) (*Skyrim*), gmlion with *Dawn of Hope Music Addon* (*Skyrim*), Michikawa with music packs according to categories (*Oblivion*), OrganicView with *CaptainCreepy - Skyrim Music Pack 1*, Tashin with *Oblivion Symphonic Variations Music Suite*, and tesfiend with *JDS Soundtrack Compilation* (*Skyrim*).

game. This distancing from the player's real environment is enhanced if the musical universe of the game is in tune with its narrative and environments. Thus, to be immersive, the video game music has to be consistent with the rest of the video game universe, and this also applies to any sounds in the game.

This consistency can be regarded as familiarity with the tropes and compositional codes in audiovisual media that are replicated and reinforced in video games' soundtracks. Isabella van Elferen proposes a clear model of the intersection of three major components in the construction of musical immersion—affect, literacy, and interaction (ALI model)—which results precisely from the growing familiarity and predictability of musical language that players develop at an individual level during their contact with different media.[40] The audiovisual literacy required from gamers in order to recognize the type of universe they're playing in, which enables them to be immersed, is directly related to the aural components developed for games of certain genres. *Oblivion* and *Skyrim* are both RPG games belonging to a series associated with medieval imagery, defined by the terms *fantasy* and *epic* on several media platforms, including official wikis, fan forums, YouTube comments, and modding spaces.

Taking *Skyrim* as the main example, the game's setting and soundtrack reinforce the paradigm of a fantasy/Nordic-medievalist idea, mixing different styles and aesthetics to promote a re-creation of a distant past and engage the player in their own character.[41] At a musical level, while using certain instruments such as drums or lutes in both non-diegetic and diegetic forms may seem historically accurate with what can be considered as a historical/medieval epoch, the orchestration and musical style are rather contemporary and constitute the romantic language used in audiovisual media from the first few decades of Hollywood cinema.

Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler claimed that moving images with green fields and a "pastoral" accompaniment would prompt a spectator to think "Aha, nature!"[42] When considering how and why a gamer adds audiovisual information to their personal media library, it is worth examining the connection between Hollywoodesque orchestration and video game music with reference to Claudia Gorbman, who states, "Music, especially lushly scored late Romantic music, can trigger a response of 'epic feeling.'"[43]

The identification of *The Elder Scrolls* titles as *epic* can, in this context, relate to the "epic musical texturing" proposed by Tim Summers, defining this process as the effect resulting from the usage of musical references that support and produce meaning from (as well as deepen) the visual, narrative, and other textual components of a certain video

40. Isabella van Elferen, "Analysing Game Musical Immersion: The ALI Model," in *Ludomusicology: Approaches to Video Game Music*, ed. Michiel Kamp, Tim Summers, and Mark Sweeney (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2016), 32–52.

41. Brendan Lamb and Barnabas Smith, "From Skyrim to Skellige: Fantasy Video Game Music within a Neo-Mediaevalist Paradigm," *Musicology Australia* 40, no. 2 (July 3, 2018): 79–100, accessed February 10, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1080/08145857.2018.1550140; Tim Summers, *Understanding Video Game Music* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

42. Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for Films* (1947; repr., London: Athlone, 1994), 13.

43. Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 81.

game: music is not limited by technology such as graphics or gameplay mechanics, and it allows the creation of referential links to other media that reinforce the personal experience of the player. Regarding the meaning of *epic*, Summers argues,

> Aside from denoting the appropriation of elements (plots, settings, musical styles, etc.) from epic Hollywood film, the use of the term may reveal an important aspect of game music. . . . it is clear that the term "epic" in the context of games and game music is not limited to the canon of classical epics. Instead, it is closer to the wider sense of the word, referring to an artistic genre that stems from classical epic poetry through to modern epic novels and epic film.[44]

The experience of an overarching narrative with a character (a hero) that the player creates and controls and the resulting emotional engagement from that interaction is reinforced in a reciprocal process of musical meaning during gameplay, enabling immersion along two central axes: the soundtrack and agency. The relationship established between the player and their own character is also an evolving process that can be linked to Rod Munday's concept of "mythic immersion."[45] The epic musical texture relates to the idea of mythic immersion through the previously mentioned relationship process and its intensification through the exploration of the video game universe, leading to a type of cinematic realism that this format borrows from musical techniques first used in film. Munday is concerned with the extent of the influence of cinematic realism and its aesthetics in video games, considering that they do not seek to represent reality but rather to augment reality through a cinematic experience.[46] On the same note, Collins states: "In many ways the realism aspired to in games is not a naturalistic realism in the sense of being a simulation of reality, but a cinematic realism that relies on established motion-picture convention. The 'cine-real' is a sense of immersion and believability, or verisimilitude, within a fantasy world."[47]

In this sense, the majority of the mods mentioned previously—in terms of both sound and music—have precisely this objective: *Oblivion* and *Skyrim* only get "really" immersive or "even more" immersive through careful work on the sound quality, sound design, and sound reality of all the components that constitute the games' environments, objects, and world elements, intertwined with a soundtrack with an adequate musical style. The use of sound and music modding to relate sensory immersion to the idea of reality in video games leads to my main point—these users negotiate the meaning of immersion according to the world they live in and the (virtual) world they play in based directly on sound

44. Summers, *Understanding Video Game Music*, 64.

45. Rod Munday, "Music in Video Games," in *Music, Sound and Multimedia: From the Live to the Virtual*, ed. Jamie Sexton (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 51–67.

46. The sharing of functions between cinema and video games, however, does not indicate that both formats operate in the same way; moreover, the interactive and direct manipulation by the player in video games requires the development of specific capabilities for music in this context, such as dynamic or adaptive functions. The cinematic experience and its realism, according to Munday, is not the experience of a fantastic world or myth but the idea of the player's own presence in that same world through the avatar they control. In fact, this is one of the objectives of open-world RPG video games and, consequently, of *Oblivion* and *Skyrim*.

47. Karen Collins, *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 134.

and music. The possibility to "feel" elements of the video game's reality that, through mods, can be equal to the characteristics found in the "real" world, is thus enabled through the combination of several elements of immersion theory and models, especially imaginative immersion (the way a video game player develops empathy and identity through gameplay), alongside sensory and mythic immersion.[48] Immersion is clearly dependent on the level of emotional appreciation and involvement of the gamers who interact with the virtual environments of *Oblivion* and *Skyrim*, so music is not only a background for the player's actions but is actively integrated into the control of the hero in the narratives of these two games. Music, therefore, becomes one of the ways that mods in the audio/music category can bring the user closer to the idea of reality in the virtual world. In the Nexus Mods cybercommunity and in current mod production practices, immersion is a negotiation of meanings between reality according to the world that the players inhabit and reality represented in the virtual worlds built by the two games analyzed here. Mods that add and/or transform musical content by offering newly composed works demonstrate each composer's personal involvement in the Nexus Mods cybercommunity. Based on the premise that the original base-soundtrack of each video game is itself immersive and is a determining factor of the type of narrative and setting conveyed in each game, these mods are also a way for players to complement and reinforce their personal experience of gameplay through new "lore-friendly" tracks and, consequently, through musical immersion enhanced by the use of lore-friendly music.

FINAL THOUGHTS AND CLOSING REMARKS

RPGs invite, in many cases, hundreds of hours of game time. For many composers the main issue is structuring a soundtrack that is adequate for this type of continuous engagement, with sounds for each setting, environment, and context that can be *blended in* with the entire experience.[49] Modification files concerning specifically sound and/or music represent a major request from many players to add to and transform their gameplay: more sound effects, better sonic ambiances, extra soundtracks. The layering of remediated sonic information over each player's gameplay aims to build an immersive experience through sonic engagement that is closer to reality than virtuality; the close relation between video games and personal context is, additionally, transposed from the interactive universe to the external sphere of this media, namely, daily life in a networked society.

Sounds of Skyrim is one of the most popular audio mods for *Skyrim* and is produced by Cliffworms, the same modder who provided *Sounds of Cyrodiil* for *Oblivion*. This mod project, which is divided into categories such as Wilds, Dungeons, and Cities, is similar to its predecessor in that it adds hundreds of sound effects to "enhance your audio experience." The search for more immersion through increasingly realistic and complete sound effects

---

48. Laura Ermi and Frans Mäyrä, "Fundamental Components of the Gameplay Experience: Analysing Immersion," in *DiGRA '05 - Proceedings of the 2005 DiGRA International Conference: Changing Views: Worlds in Play*, ed. Suzanne de Castell and Jennifer Jenson, 15–27, accessed February 10, 2021, http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/06276.41516.pdf.

49. Aaron Marks, *The Complete Guide to Game Audio: For Composers, Musicians, Sound Designers, and Game Developers*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Focal/Elsevier, 2009).

extends to adding sonic environments that wouldn't exist at all without this mod: *Skyrim* has no cats, and *Oblivion* has no blacksmiths in town, but the mod's description states:

> In cities, you can hear the sound of a hammer being used by a villager repairing something, children playing, dogs barking or cats fighting. As you get closer to a tavern doorstep, the sounds of patron chatting from behind the door are played. When you get in, some patron may laugh out loud, yell or break something.[50]

In this case, enhancing means adding sonic information, including sound that has never been present in unmodified gameplay, to what is believed to be a real medieval soundscape. In a first modded playthrough these sound cues may be noticeable, but over time they are likely to blend in and promote, as intended, a more realistic experience that can be reinforced by new musical tracks in addition to the original musical accompaniment by Jeremy Soule.

This article has covered the specific but important role of sound and music in the production of mods and user engagement with video games in and out of virtual worlds. Looking at the relevant categories on Nexus Mods, the biggest and still most-used online mods platform for two of the most-accessed games on the site, *Oblivion* and *Skyrim*, it is clear that these aural components are a key aspect for players and producers. The analysis of textual sources such as mod titles, descriptions, forums, and comments, and also from the interviews conducted with the composers of mods, shows a general need among gamers to add to and modify original games with own personal inputs. Whether by enhancing or limiting the sonic spectrum of effects and ambiances, or by composing extra hours of original and *adequate* music, these modders actively participate and interact with an online cybercommunity, building social and symbolic capital and incorporating these virtual narratives in their daily "real" lives.

"Real life" can be gamified too, by accompanying certain daily tasks with endless hours of music and ambiance from *Skyrim*'s taverns or the wilds of *Oblivion* (which are available on YouTube), thus transforming one's personal sonic space and identity into a fantasy-medieval experience. From professionals to enthusiasts, or modders to users, several channels promote audiovisual content based on video game soundscapes and music, reinforcing the online circulation of the main type of resources that can be accessed from a game without being in the game. Users can simulate hours spent at

---

50. *Sounds of Skyrim - Civilization*, mod uploaded by user Cliffworms, Nexus Mods, May 7, 2013, accessed January 22, 2021, https://www.nexusmods.com/skyrim/mods/10886. It is interesting to note a particular aspect of the description of this mod in relation to the various features and changes that the author seeks to point out in order to encourage its download. One of the modifications that Cliffworms sought to make is the difference between the sounds and ambiances that accompany the action depending on the location and its social status: "Depending on the social class of the tavern (Low, Mid, High), you get a different song set and a different sound set. Patrons burp and yell more in low class taverns than in high class ones." Curiously, the author sought to aurally represent the stereotypes and sound tropes associated with social structures that characterize taverns and social spaces of high and low culture, reinforcing the social capital of a more "civilized" place through clients who do not burp or shout, unlike lower classes. Like the musical codes that are reproduced in media soundtracks to engage with the audiovisual literacy of the player, Cliffworms's transformation of *Oblivion* social environments and soundscapes, which includes this typified aspect, is considered by the modder to be one more way of making video games immersive through a realistic experience.

Skyrim's fireplaces with music to help them relax or study, experience the audio overhauls offered by modders to aid sleep and meditation, or listen to a soundtrack compilation while they complete their homework or clean the house in an epic and medieval style.[51] Video games' (sonic) universes are not only modded but extended, transformed, and circulated by users in online spaces that promote a close integration of sound and music originating in a virtual context with *reality*, negotiating meaning and agency in the multiple media one can engage with. It is important to focus on the users' perspective on the different roles and forms of agency that define them as active participants in the consumption and transformation of texts that require a high level of understanding. Gamers build familiarity through their personal and collective engagement with the music they consume, transform, and circulate, integrating it into their daily life and even their professional environments.[52] If the cybercommunities themselves, through production and creative flow, question the power of the cultural industries and entities seeking to regulate—and often sanction—their creations, this is a reflection of the complexity of intertextual dialogues resulting from the appropriation and transformation of preexisting content or content made available by them.[53]

To conclude, these produsers are (game) *music lovers*. As Antoine Hennion has shown, music can be seen as an unpredictable event, a live performance, a phenomenon generated by instruments, machines, hands, or actions; the way in which music is heard and experienced is intimately related to both individual and collective social practices that condition musical taste.[54] Just as a music lover looks for ways to establish their listening space and tool-building and expand their musical knowledge, sound and music modders are, above all, *game music lovers* who seek to adapt and extend the sounds that they consider fit to enable deeper immersion in a game. These modders identify themselves as fans of video games and, in particular, supporters of their own communities, which simultaneously become an incentive and a base for their own production of both content and meaning through soundscapes, music, and narratives. Through their mods, these users share their way of not only listening but also thinking about what they listen to, and they integrate this knowledge into their daily lives. ◾

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adorno, Theodor W., and Hanns Eisler. *Composing for Film*. 1947. Reprint, London: Athlone, 1994.

Anderson, Benedict R. O. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

51. Examples of videos/playlists of these phenomena can be found here: "Skyrim – Music & Ambience – Day," video uploaded by the channel Everness, YouTube, December 10, 2016, accessed January 22, 2021, https://youtu.be/hBkcwy-iWt8; "Skyrim - Tavern Ambiance (Bard Music, Fire Pit, Relaxation)," video uploaded by the channel Ambiance Magic, YouTube, June 26, 2017, accessed January 22, 2021, https://youtu.be/jz50ojSxIEM; "1-Hours Epic Music | Jeremy Soule | Skyrim - The Best Original Game Soundtrack," video uploaded by the channel Epic Composition, YouTube, January 15, 2015, accessed January 22, 2021, https://youtu.be/HrK3qZEceVA.

52. Emma Keltie, *The Culture Industry and Participatory Audiences* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

53. Keltie, *Culture Industry and Participatory Audiences*.

54. Antoine Hennion, "Music Lovers: Taste as Performance," *Theory, Culture & Society* 18, no. 5 (October 1, 2001): 1–22, accessed February 10, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1177/02632760122051940.

Au, Wagner James. "Triumph of the Mod." Salon, April 16, 2002. Accessed February 10, 2021. http://www.salon.com/2002/04/16/modding/.

Austin, Michael. "Orchestrating Difference: Representing Gender in Video Game Music." In *Masculinities in Play*, edited by Nicholas Taylor and Gerald Voorhees, 165–83. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018. Accessed February 10, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90581-5_10.

Birnbaum, Ian. "Behind Falskaar, a Massive New Skyrim Mod, and the 19-Year-Old Who Spent a Year Building It." *PC Gamer*, July 16, 2013. Accessed January 22, 2021. https://www.pcgamer.com/behind-falskaar-a-massive-new-skyrim-mod-and-the-19-year-old-who-spent-a-year-building-it/.

Bruns, Axel. *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.

Calleja, Gordon. *In-Game: From Immersion to Incorporation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011.

Champion, Erik. *Game Mods: Design, Theory and Criticism*. Pittsburgh, PA: ETC Press, 2012. Accessed February 10, 2021. http://repository.cmu.edu/etcpress/11.

Christiansen, Peter. "Between a Mod and a Hard Place." In *Game Mods: Design, Theory and Criticism*, edited by Erik Champion, 29–49. Pittsburgh, PA:, ETC Press, 2012.

Collins, Karen. *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.

Cook, Karen M. "Music, History, and Progress in Sid Meier's Civilization IV." In *Music in Video Games: Studying Play*, edited by K. J. Donnelly, William Gibbons, and Neil Lerner, 166–82. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Cooper, Victoria Elizabeth. "Fantasies of the North: Medievalism and Identity in Skyrim." PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2016. Accessed February 10, 2021. http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/16875/.

Finch, Greg, "The Top 10 Game Mods of All Time." The Creators Project, July 20, 2011. Accessed January 22, 2021. http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/the-top-10-game-mods-of-all-time.

Freitas, Joana. "'So medieval like, so gentle, so perfect': as categorias musicais da banda sonora do videojogo *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*." *Revista de Ciências da Computação* 12, no. Especial (2017) (March 15, 2018): 65–80. Accessed February 10, 2021. https://doi.org/10.34627/rcc.v12iEspecial.14.

Freitas, Joana. "'The Music Is the Only Thing You Don't Have to Mod': The Musical Composition in Modification Files for Videogames." Master's thesis, NOVA FCSH, 2017.

Gaston, Martin. "Skyrim's Falskaar Mod Maker Lands Games Industry Job." GameSpot, November 26, 2013. Accessed January 22, 2021. https://www.gamespot.com/articles/skyrim-s-falskaar-mod-maker-lands-games-industry-job/1100-6416394/.

Grandstaff, Matt. "New Creation Kit to Bring Modding Tools to Skyrim." *Bethesda Blog*, January 19, 2011. Accessed January 22, 2021. http://www.bethblog.com/2011/01/19/new-creation-kit-to-bring-modding-tools-to-skyrim/.

Gorbman, Claudia. *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Hart, Iain. "Meaningful Play: Performativity, Interactivity and Semiotics in Video Game Music." *Musicology Australia* 36, no. 2 (July 3, 2014): 273–90. Accessed February 10, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1080/08145857.2014.958272.

Hjorth, Larissa. *Games and Gaming: An Introduction to New Media*. Oxford, UK: Berg, 2011.

Kamp, Michiel, and Mark Sweeney. "Musical Landscapes in Skyrim." In *Music in the Role-Playing Game: Heroes & Harmonies*, edited by William Gibbons and Steven Reale, 179–96. London: Routledge, 2019.

Kücklich, Julian. "Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry." In "Precarious Labour," special issue, *Fibreculture Journal*, no. 5 (December 2005). Accessed February 10, 2021. http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precarious-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/.

Lamb, Brendan, and Barnabas Smith. "From Skyrim to Skellige: Fantasy Video Game Music within a Neo-Mediaevalist Paradigm." *Musicology Australia* 40, no. 2 (July 3, 2018): 79–100. Accessed February 10, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1080/08145857.2018.1550140.

Leo, Jon. "19-Year-Old Created 25-Hour Skyrim Mod to Apply for a Job at Bethesda." GameSpot, July 18, 2013. Accessed January 22, 2021. https://www.gamespot.com/articles/19-year-old-created-25-hour-skyrim-mod-to-apply-for-a-job-at-bethesda/1100-6411623/.

Jenkins, Henry. *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.

Jenkins, Henry. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

Marks, Aaron. *The Complete Guide to Game Audio: For Composers, Musicians, Sound Designers, and Game Developers*. Oxford, UK: Focal/Elsevier, 2009.

Martin, Paul. "The Pastoral and the Sublime in Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion." *Game Studies* 11, no. 3 (December 2011). Accessed February 10, 2021. http://gamestudies.org/1103/articles/martin.

Munday, Rod. "Music in Video Games." In *Music, Sound and Multimedia: From the Live to the Virtual*, edited by Jamie Sexton, 51–67. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Phillips, Winifred. *A Composer's Guide to Game Music*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014.

Poor, Nathaniel. "Computer Game Modders' Motivations and Sense of Community: A Mixed-Methods Approach." *New Media & Society* 16, no. 8 (December 1, 2014): 1249–67. Accessed February 10, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813504266.

Postigo, Hector. "Of Mods and Modders: Chasing Down the Value of Fan-Based Digital Game Modifications." *Games and Culture* 2, no. 4 (October 1, 2007): 300–13. Accessed February 10, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412007307955.

Purchese, Robert. "Skyrim Falskaar Mod-Maker Lands a Games Job." Eurogamer, November 26, 2013. Accessed January 22, 2021. https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2013-11-26-skyrim-falskaar-mod-maker-lands-a-games-job.

Purchese, Robert. "Teenager's Massive Skyrim Mod Took 2000 Hours to Make." Eurogamer, July 17, 2013. Accessed January 22, 2021. https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2013-07-17-hey-bethesda-this-19yo-spent-2000-hours-making-a-25-hour-skyrim-mod.

Rowe, Braeden. "Why Is 'Skyrim' Still Fun after All This Time? Mods!" Culture of Gaming, August 3, 2020. Accessed January 22, 2021. https://cultureofgaming.com/why-is-skyrim-still-fun-after-all-this-time-mods/.

Salen, Katie Tekinbaş, and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003.

Scacchi, Walt. "Computer Game Mods, Modders, Modding, and the Mod Scene." *First Monday* 15, no. 5 (2010). Accessed February 10, 2021. https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v15i5.2965.

Sihvonen, Tanja. *Players Unleashed! Modding the Sims and the Culture of Gaming*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011.

Sotamaa, Olli. "When the Game Is Not Enough: Motivations and Practices among Computer Game Modding Culture." *Games and Culture* 5, no. 3 (January 7, 2010): 239–55. Accessed February 10, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412009359765.

Terranova, Tiziana. "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy." *Social Text* 18, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 33–58.